

A CLINICAL NOTE ON THE PROPAGATION OF INSANITY.

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A PROMINENT member of a State Legislature and a very shrewd and observant man, when speaking of the appropriations called for for the care of the insane in his State, which had risen to a higher figure than ever before, made the remark that he would not grudge all that was asked, if he could only see the insane stop reproducing themselves. His common-sense recognized that heredity was one of the most important factors in the increase of insanity, which is becoming one of the most serious problems of the present time. If it were practicable to prevent the marriage of those with known hereditary neurotic or insane tendencies, it would unquestionably be a very much less serious one.

The records of a hospital, new and as yet comparatively small, do not afford the fullest data on the question of the heredity of insanity, and yet I have found in them some facts that are suggestive, if not conclusive enough for large generalizations. Out of 518 individuals admitted as patients to the Illinois Eastern Hospital for the Insane up to last October, some statements in regard to their family history were obtained in just one half, or 259 cases. In 154 of these there was a vicious heredity either of insanity or other nervous disease, or of intemperance of parents. In

104, or two fifths of the whole, there was a family history of insanity. In very few cases was the history complete; and there is some reason to believe that in several of those in which the heredity was reported good, there might yet have been a neurotic or insane taint. In one or two instances this was assured, and they were added to the other category. There are very obvious temptations to suppress facts of hereditary mental disease, and it is easy to suppose that in some instances the records may be incomplete and even misleading as to this important point.

The main point, however, to which it was intended to call attention in this article, is the relative frequency of the intermarriage of the insane and those with hereditary insane tendencies. There are in Illinois, according to the most recent estimates, in round numbers, about 6,000 insane, or one to a little over 500 of the population. Even if we double, treble, or quadruple this frequency, so as to include all that have been or are to be insane, as well as those insane at the present time, it would not appear that there was much probability of two insane persons being married according to any ordinary law of chances, but in fact we find four out of the 104 with insane heredity had both father and mother insane. In one of these cases the insane heredity involved parents and both grandparents on each side, though in the case of the latter the histories show it only as collateral. Besides these, three patients had direct paternal and collateral maternal heredity; two had direct maternal and collateral paternal heredity, and in one case there was collateral heredity of insanity on both sides. This makes altogether nearly ten per cent. of those with insane heredity, with it on both sides, maternal and paternal, and thus favored with a double opportunity to inherit mental disease. If we add to this the instances where, with insanity of one parent, there is reported either epilepsy, hysteria, or drunkenness, "brain disease,"

"nervousness," etc., of the other, the ratio of double inheritance rises to over twenty per cent.

In many, and probably in most, large asylums, there are found at the same time several patients that are related to each other in various degrees of consanguinity. A study of the family histories in such cases sometimes reveals very suggestive and remarkable facts as to the intermarriage of the insane, and instead of following out direct lines of heredity one finds himself involved, to use a professional simile, in a regular plexus of inosculating branches from several family stems. It is difficult to obtain complete and perfectly accurate data in all respects in such cases, but sometimes enough can be obtained to afford a very striking and interesting record. I have in one case obtained the following, which I think is correct as regards the main facts. Of course I substitute fictitious names, employing those of about the same relative frequency as the real ones.

William Bronson, who afterward became insane and committed suicide, and his wife, Susan Hopkins, had, with perhaps other children of whom we have no record, three daughters, two of whom became insane. One of these died without issue; the other married John Woodbridge, and had by him a son and daughter. The former married a Miss Hopkins (whether related to his grandmother or not is unknown), and by her had two daughters, one of whom is now insane, and the other, married to F. E. Crane, whose father was insane, has by him an insane son. The daughter of John Woodbridge did not, so far as known, become herself deranged, but her daughter, Cynthia Hopkins (married to a nephew of her uncle's wife), is now an inmate of an asylum.

The third daughter of William Bronson married Andrew Munson, and their daughter Catharine married (1st) William Crane, and had by him three children; (2d) married James Woodbridge, whose father was insane, and who was himself the father of an insane daughter by a former wife. It was while visiting this daughter at the asylum where she was confined that he first met Mrs. Crane, who was then also going through an attack of insanity, similar to those she had afterward for the remainder of her

life, and they were married during one of her lucid periods. William Crane appears to have been himself a member of an insane family, as his brother, Jonas Crane, is the father of an insane daughter, and it is perhaps worth noting that he has a step-son who has married into still another insane family.

There appear to be four insane families represented in the above, the original Bronson, Hopkins, Woodbridge, and Crane ; at least the repetition of names would appear to indicate this, and suggests a number of insane marriages that cannot be positively proven to be such. I may say here that I have seen indications of several other similar plexuses of insane heredity that I have not yet been able to trace out to any satisfactory extent. The one I have given is more suggestive than complete ; indeed, it is hardly possible in any case to thoroughly follow out all the ramifications of cross-relationship and intermarriage in such a record.

I have learned from Dr. Dewey of three cases in one hospital where husband and wife were patients together, and of another in which two patients were married after their discharge, as they claimed, with the approval and by the advice of the superintendent. The husband in this case is a periodic maniac, and is ending his days as a State pauper in an asylum ; the wife continued sane, and the one surviving offspring of this union has not, so far as known, yet shown any actual insanity.

I will not venture to assign or suggest any causes for the singular tendency here indicated of persons with an hereditary liability to mental disease, to select each other for life-mates, and thus to perpetuate and intensify in their offspring their own unfortunate inheritance. But if such tendency exists, as appears somewhat probable from the facts I have stated, it is a matter for serious consideration, and for further study and observation. I have seen, thus far, very little mention of it in medical literature.